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Lesu

LIFE IN LESU

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THREE degrees south of the equator in the Western Pacific is the village of Lesu, on the east coast of New Ireland, part of the Bismarck Archipelago, a group of islands lying north-east of Australia. The New Irelanders are the tall, more or less well-built Melanesian type, with kinky black hair, brown skin, and somewhat negroid features, and are a hospitable, kindly, good-natured people. In the past the men wore no clothing at all and the women only a straw apron. To-day, however, because of white influence, every-one wears a loin-cloth, and the women sometimes wear blouses, but most of the time these are omitted.

In size, New Ireland is the second largest island of the Bismarck Archipelago, and is long and narrow in shape. Running through the centre is a low range of mountains, about 3,000 feet at their highest altitude. Along the coast, beginning at the northern end, runs a road for over a hundred miles, one of the few roads in the whole Territory of New Guinea. The road follows the coast in a winding fashion, uphill and downhill, and over it travel the natives, by foot, and occasionally by bicycle, from one village to another. Long stretches of road have on one side the dense bush with its thick undergrowth of tangled vines, its bright-coloured flowers, among them the familiar south-sea hibiscus, the tall coconut palms, the delicate bamboo trees, the nodding areca palms, and many other trees over which fly brightly plumed birds. On the other side lies a sea which is dazzlingly brilliant in the sunshine, its glare broken here

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THE "LULUAI" OR CHIEF

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A HAPPY FAMILY IN FRONT OF THEIR HOME

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FATHER PLAYING WITH HIS SON

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LITTLE GIRLS PLAYING AT DANCING

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CARRYING THE BABY AND A LOAD FROM THE GARDEN

MOTHER NURSING HER BABY

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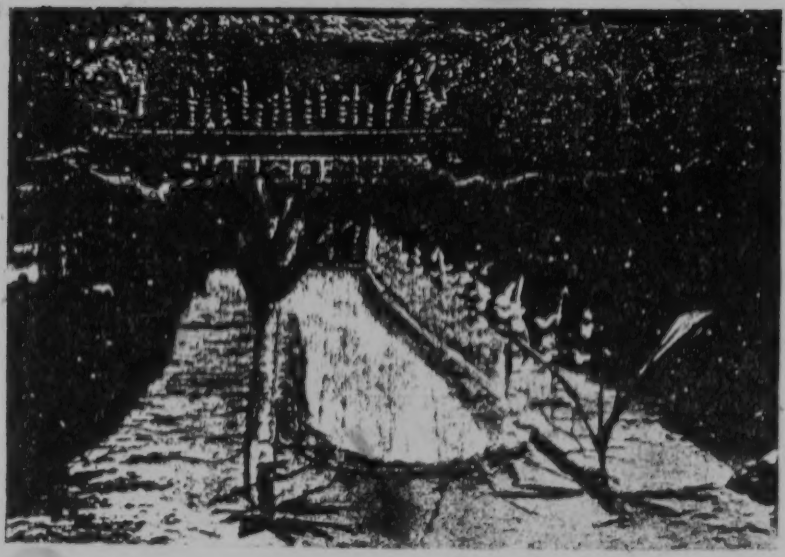
WORKING IN THE GARDEN



MALANGGAN WHICH WAS SOLD AND ITS DECORATIVE SETTING

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THE CAPTURED WILD PIG

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TSERA, SHELL CURRENCY WITH ORNAMENT ATTACHED

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stomach, the liver, and the spleen. Make her mouth round, the mouth of the girl." The rounding of the mouth appears to refer to the fact that when the spell has taken effect the mouth will not go through its normal functions of eating, smoking, etc.

Another spell is made over the *kuskus* leaf, of which the straw aprons formerly worn by the women were made.

Lungstora Tsanatsoa
galin galin ta
galin galin sombim
Tulumurutk
Liw nor tulumurutk
roro roro mating diwwairung mu roro

Fly to Tsanatsoa (name of girl for whom spell was being made), go, go in her eye, go, go down her chest. Make her inside "hot." Last four lines repeated.

She will think only of this man. Blood, blood, carry spell down to the stomach and liver.

The last two lines are repeated many times with the head on the arms.

The above spell is said over the leaf, and for this spell the girl should be present. The magician slaps her chest with the leaf and then throws it away into the bush. This action indicates that it will be a temporary "affair," and that the girl will eventually return to her husband. Should the magician throw the leaf on the fire, however, it indicates that the girl will stay with her lover and not return to the husband.

The following spell is said over the *tsil* leaf, which is then hung up in the men's house over the fire. Just as there will be smoke if the fire burns the leaf, so will

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and opposite moiety, *i.e.*, an "Eagle" woman would be washed by a "Hawk" woman, and vice versa. The same people then carry the corpse (male or female) to the men's house, or to the house where the person had formerly lived. In discussing the matter, a native will tell you that the custom is to take the corpse to the men's house, but as a matter of actual practice the writer observed that it was more often brought back to its former house, or, in the case of an old woman, to a daughter's house. The corpse is clothed in its loin cloth (this of course is an innovation, the loin cloth having been introduced by the whites) and set upon a bamboo structure called *bāk*,[7] in the doorway of the house. The corpse is propped up on this structure and the only native explanation is that this is something to hold the body over which the mourners will wail. At most of the funerals witnessed the *bāk* was there, but not functioning. Instead, the corpse was lying inside the house on the usual bamboo bed. The reason given for not using the *bāk* was that the corpse could not be made to sit upon it—the legs were too swollen, or some other similar reason. As soon as the body has been set upon its *bāk*, or bier, wailing is continued. By this time the people from hamlets near by have arrived, and soon those from the distant part of the village have come also. Word is immediately carried to the neighbouring villages and from these come in particular the clan relatives of the dead person. The wailing is kept up almost continuously day and night, until the body is buried. This period may be from one to three days, depending upon the age and prestige of the person who has died. During this interval preparations for the burial feast are in progress and naturally the longer the interval the more food can be collected and prepared.

The women go to the gardens and bring in the taro and then begin the work of scraping it and preparing it to be baked. Sometimes one sees the women scraping the taro and wailing at the same time. The men, in the meantime, are bringing in firewood, tending the *liga* (the pile of hot stones in which the food is baked), or are concerned with cooking pigs or fish. The actual direction of the preparations for the feast is in the hands of a clan relative—

[7] ā as in hat.